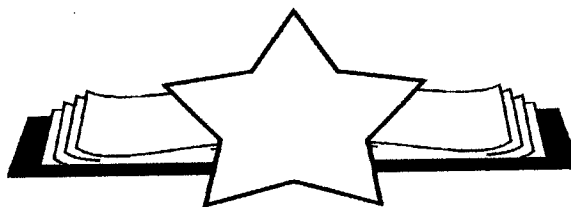


## NEW JERSEY

2000-2001

## Guidelines and Application

STAR



SCHOOLS

**Deadline for Application to County Office:**  
**NOVEMBER 27, 2000**

The Star School application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page

|   |   |  |          |
|---|---|--|----------|
| County  | Burlington                                  |  |          |
| District<br>(Proper Name)   | Rancocas Valley Regional School District    |  |          |
| Address   | 520 Jacksonville Road                       |  |          |
|   | Street/P. O. Box<br>Mount Holly, New Jersey | 08060                                    | Zip Code |
|   | City  |  |          |
| Telephone   | Fax 609 265-9204                            | Email rvrhs@rancocas<br>valley.k12.nj.us |          |
| Chief School Administrator  | Dr. Henry G. Cram                           |  |          |
| Nominated School<br>(Proper Name)   | Rancocas Valley Regional High School        |  |          |
| Address   | 520 Jacksonville Road                       |  |          |
|   | Street/P. O. Box<br>Mount Holly, New Jersey | 08060                                    | Zip Code |
|   | City  |  |          |
| Telephone   | Fax 609 265-9204                            | Email hcram@rancocas<br>valley.k12.nj.us |          |
| Principal   | Dr. Henry G. Cram                           |  |          |
| Chief School Administrator's or<br>Charter School Lead Person's Signature |   |  |          |

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ☒ Yes ☐ No County Superintendent's Signature

**NEW JERSEY  
STAR SCHOOLS  
2000-2001 APPLICATION**

**RESPONSES to the information below and the statements must be ANONYMOUS.** No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school or the community. Use the words "the school" in referring to the applicant in the responses to the statements.

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:   |   |  |
| <b>Type of School</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School<br><input type="checkbox"/> Middle School<br><input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High School<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <b>Grade Levels</b><br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>9-12<br>_____ | <b>School Enrollment</b> <u>1840</u><br><br><b>Name of the School's Specialization or Whole-School Reform Model</b><br><u>Middle States Association</u><br><u>Commission on Secondary Schools</u><br><u>Accreditation For Growth</u><br><u>Design 2000</u> |
| <b>Location:</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Urban/city; <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suburban with urban characteristics; <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban; <input type="checkbox"/> Small City/Town; <input type="checkbox"/> Rural            |   |  |
| <b>Previous Star School:</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, Year(s) _____   |   |  |

**KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to the statements below must be no more than a total of five pages. Keyboard the statement followed by the response.

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*,\* that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.
2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.
3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.
4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.
5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.
6. **Previous Star School Winners Only:** Provide a one-page addendum to your application that describes efforts to expand or replicate the specialization or whole-school reform model within the school and/or the district. Have there been dissemination activities beyond the school or district? If so, please elaborate.

\*The May 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.

In 1997 the school community adopted the Middle States Association's Commission on Secondary Schools Accreditation for Growth protocol (AFG) which is a school improvement process that the district refers to as *Design 2000*. A planning group of staff members, administrators, board members and community members developed a district mission statement, statements of beliefs and specific goals which have been adopted to guide the district's whole-school reform and improvement process. Several standing committees of stakeholders were established and continue to meet to review the need for change in the areas of scheduling, curriculum, instruction, assessment, technology, school climate, and school community relations and to make recommendations to the Board of Education for improvement. The following major goals have been established:

- the improvement of student achievement
- the expanded use of technology
- the improvement of school/community relations
- the identification of alternative funding sources.

The school prides itself on meeting the needs of a diverse population of students and in creating programs that provide those students with a challenging, stress-free, safe and well-maintained learning environment. Initiatives such as the locally developed "*Courtesy is Contagious*" campaign, the integration of social and emotional learning skills, and the school's student assistance and crisis intervention programs are just a few examples of the efforts made to teach interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and to help students develop character.

Academic programs have been restructured to allow the students to create educational opportunities that best suit their needs. The implementation of a semesterized block schedule set the stage for a number of curriculum and instructional revisions that have enhanced the students' achievement level, allowed for the use of recommended curriculum frameworks and accommodated the increased graduation requirements. The extended instructional periods have resulted in a more nurturing environment with more positive personal relations between students and faculty, fewer student failures and increased opportunities for student success.

Morning tutorials, scheduled student prep time (grade room), available evening classes, community college offerings and a summer completion program encourage the students to extend their school day and year with additional opportunity for academic success.

Team-taught inclusion classes and basic skill development courses, self-contained special education programs, two proficiency-based alternative school programs, and an extensive course offering of honors and advanced placement level programs combine to provide students of varying academic ability the opportunity to challenge themselves. Students are also encouraged to explore personal interests and aptitudes through an extensive offering of elective courses in the arts, theater, music, consumer sciences, technology, world languages, business, independent study, community service and an ROTC program. The school's program of studies includes over 150 course offerings.

All of these efforts combine to meet the students' educational needs, raise expectations and address the state's Core Curriculum Content and Workplace Readiness Standards.

*2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.*

Professional development is an integral part of the school's culture. The district's staff development program is supported by a commitment of time, financial support and administrative encouragement. Staff members regularly attend state and regional professional association conventions, workshops, and meetings, as well as commercially offered workshops and in-house training programs designed to promote content specific knowledge and the improvement of instructional performance. Fifty percent of the professional staff hold advanced degrees.

All staff members are provided with professional development opportunities through the district wide in-service program. One full day and two half day in-services are built into each school year schedule. Nationally prominent presenters ( ie. Carol Cummings, David Sousa, Maurice Elias, Robert Sylwester) as well as regional and local experts and university professors ( ie. Rutgers, Lasalle) are recruited to provide workshop training.

Given the level of professional development afforded to the staff over the last several years together with the growth of the school and the influx of new teachers, the district has determined the need for and now provides specific training programs for new teachers and teachers new to the district. This training includes a four-day orientation including instructional skills training presented by the superintendent/principal and an on-going mentorship program that focuses on teaching and learning, induction into the school culture and peer observation.

The need for advanced instructional techniques to meet the challenges of block scheduling, the desire to improve student achievement with a diverse population, and the goal of integrating technology into the classroom has been the impetus for many of the professional development opportunities offered through the district and supported by its partnership with institutions of higher learning. The district also maintains a close relationship with the county ETTC and Educational Services Unit that provide professional development resources.

A sampling of the content of the on-going staff development program includes instruction on alternative assessment techniques and strategies; work sessions on the whole school reform and the school improvement process; integrating the Internet into the curriculum, implementation of the state core content standards, brain research findings and social and emotional learning. A variety of in-house workshops conducted by professional staff trained as turnkey trainers are also a part of the district's professional development program. Professional development opportunities are provided on a year round basis, and staff members are paid a modest stipend to attend training programs.

Research has been conducted to determine better if current staff development offerings are meeting the needs of the staff. A recent survey revealed the need for a "teacher sharing time" for teachers to meet with their peers who have had different training experiences and come from different departments with the goal of collaborating on teaching and assessment strategies. As a result of this survey, teacher-sharing programs designed to meet this need have been planned and successfully implemented.

The district's local professional development committee has been actively engaged in coordinating and planning these activities and provides mechanisms in support of the state mandated required 100 hours. It is felt that this mandate will reinforce on-going district activities.

3. *Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative and/or management strategies implemented.*

The school district operates with a superintendent/principal as its chief executive officer. An assistant superintendent for business and a number of building level administrative and supervisory assistants work with the chief school administrator. The focus of the superintendent/principal and the supervisory staff is centered on improving instruction and increasing student achievement. Managerial responsibilities such as attendance, discipline, budgeting, maintenance and non-instructional functions are overseen by assistant principals, department chairs and deans, many of whom divide their time between teaching and part time administrative responsibilities. Clear lines are maintained between the responsibilities for curriculum, instruction, assessment and the related managerial functions of the school's operation.

The superintendent/principal and the supervisory staff maintain a regular presence in the classroom with formal and informal observations and sustain an ongoing dialogue about instructional issues with staff through conferences, department and faculty meetings and regular informal contacts with professional staff.

Administrative council meetings are held bi-weekly and the agendas and minutes of those meetings are made available to all staff. The administrative staff and supervisory staff are consistently available to all staff members.

As part of the school improvement process, several school improvement committees meet regularly to monitor the school's climate, culture and progress towards its objectives. These committees have administrative representation that allows for constant, open communication about potential problems which may need to be addressed, alternative solutions to identified problems and new initiatives that may advance the district's mission and goals. All significant educational and/or operational issues evolve from or are reviewed by one or more of these standing committees.

Board, administration and professional association relations have been excellent. The district has experienced only a few, minor contract disputes and has enjoyed cooperative relations with respect to its school improvement planning process, professional development efforts, implementation of state mandates, and changes in regulations. The effort to establish a true learning community environment has had the general support of all stakeholders.

Fiscally, the school has succeeded in reducing its per pupil cost from among the highest in the county to the second lowest regional high school per pupil cost in the state. The district's tax rate is lower today than in the recent past and the relatively stable tax levy has resulted in the regular passage of the annual school budget and the recent passage (by approximately 2 to 1) of a \$26 million referendum for the expansion and modernization of the school. Even with this fiscal restraint, the district spends above the state average in maintenance and in instructional supplies and provides a clean safe learning environment in which teachers are afforded adequate supplies and materials with which to perform their jobs.

4. *Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the Core Curriculum Content Standards? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or district standardized norm reference tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.*

The district's mission statement and statements of belief reflect a process of assessment that attempts to align and match the tasks embedded in the curricular and co-curricular frameworks of each course and activity in which the students are engaged. Continuously monitoring student progress and achievement is a critical component to the school's self-assessment and improvement process. The school administration, in conjunction with the staff, monitors and reviews the quarterly academic performance of the students through interim reports and marking period grade distributions, and an annual student performance report is used as the basis for setting goals for continuous improvement in student achievement. In a testament to this effort, The Center For Government Services, based at Rutgers University, stated in a 1996-1997 position paper pertaining to School District Achievement, that the school was one of eight in New Jersey providing "Consistent data demonstrating real improvement in their school performance."

To ensure the alignment of academic content to the Core Curriculum Content Standards, the school's curriculum committee developed A General Guide for Creating and Revising Curriculum. That guide, developed during the 1999-2000 school year, defines the standards to be met and the protocol to be followed to ensure that course rationale and development are strongly interwoven with the NJ Core Standards. All curriculums developed and content prepared are now measured against this document.

Examination of selected student performance data indicates the improvement in student performance resulting from these efforts and those made in instruction and scheduling. Students' first attempt on the HSPT have consistently been above 85% for each section and aggregate HSPT passing rates for the 1999-2000 school year were greater than 96% for each subject, surpassing both the passing rates for the school's District Factor Grouping (DFG) and the state average.

Average SAT scores have risen nine points since 1996, and the number of students taking the test has more than doubled over the past ten years. At the same time, the gap has been narrowed between the school's achievement and the mean statewide DFG scores.

Last year, 38 percent of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students completed rigorous AP courses. For the years 1997-2000, an average of 50% of the students completing one or more Advanced Placement exams scored a 3 or better on one or more of the exams. Additionally, in 1999-2000 five students were named as Advanced Placement Scholars.

Another result of the district's efforts to improve student performance through changes in instruction, curriculum and assessment is the maintenance of rigorous academic standards. A seven point grading system is used with a 70% required for passing. The total number of students with one or more final grade failures has been reduced from 37% to 18% while the percentage of students achieving honor roll status now averages more than one third. The school's drop out rate is less than 3%, and approximately 80% of those who graduate pursue post-secondary education.

In addition to academics, students at the school regularly distinguish themselves individually and as members of school sponsored organizations in the arts, athletics, and service to the community. Illustrative of these accomplishments are: Governor's School candidates, conference, county and state championship athletic teams, state and regional band and choir member selections, competitions in academic contests, scholarship awards and recognition awarded to the school's yearbook and newspaper.

*5. Describe collaborative efforts with parents, business, the community and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.*

The school has made great strides, as a result of its school improvement process, with respect to its school community relations. The improvement process helped the school become more deliberate and effective in its efforts to improve student achievement through community interest and support, parent involvement and effective communication with local businesses.

A permanent school and community committee made up of staff, community members and parents meets monthly with the superintendent/principal to monitor school and community relations and to direct volunteer efforts. The committee supports several programs and projects including an educational foundation, an alumni association, activity chaperones, volunteer workers, a student mentorship program and Project Graduation. This group was also critical to the district's recent bond referendum providing a ready and reliable vehicle through which the school could communicate its needs for and information about the building program.

The district conducted a community survey during the fall of 1998. This survey was conducted by phone, mailings, and parent surveys distributed at back to school night. The results were used as an external scan to identify areas of community pride and concern. In addition to the opinion survey, demographic studies have been completed and now serve as a basis for the building expansion program and five-year facilities planning. A survey of graduates was also conducted to determine "customer satisfaction" with the current program offerings and the effectiveness of those programs in preparing students for further study and/or the world of work.

On-going communications with parents and the larger school community are maintained through; two back-to-school night programs, special programs for incoming students and their parents, college and job fairs, newsletters, school calendars, student agenda books, guidance office mailings and evening office hours, a local access cable TV station operated by the district and a school website.

Partnerships with businesses, service organizations, alumni, social agencies, government services and other community resources have also been strengthened and increased. The extent of school /community cooperation can be seen in the following activities: an extensive evening adult program (adult diploma and community education); fine arts, musical, dramatic productions; and sporting events offered evenings and weekends; community college classes hosted at the high school; community service projects and activities; scholarship programs supported by local businesses totaling approximately \$100,000.00 per year; and a variety of community recognition opportunities such as the VIP Program and the Sports Hall of Fame.

Discovering opportunities to work with the entire school community and all of its stakeholders has been an ongoing process that has allowed the school to explore additional opportunities for the students to learn and has led to the discovery of ways to provide the community with services it needs. The result has been consistent community support for the school.